

CURRENT AFFAIRS JULY 2021

SUB-CATEGORISATION OF OTHER BACKWARD CLASSES

Union Cabinet has approved an extension by six months of the term of Justice Rohini Commission examining the possibility of sub-categorisation within the Other Backward Classes (OBCs) in the Central list.

Background

- The Union Government constituted a four⁷ member commission headed by Justice G. Rohini in 2017 under Article 340 with an aim to improve the equitability of sharing of benefits among OBCs.
 - o The article 340 of the Indian Constitution lays down conditions for the appointment of a Commission to investigate the conditions of backward classes.
- Mandate of the Commission:
 - o Examining the extent of inequitable distribution of benefits of reservation (i.e. 27 percent reservation in jobs and education) among the castes or communities with reference to the central OBC list.
 - o Work out the mechanism, criteria, norms and parameters in a scientific approach for sub-categorization of OBCs.

Who are OBCs?

- OBC is a collective term used by the Government to classify castes which are educationally or socially disadvantaged. (OBCs are referred to as Socially and Educationally Backward Classes).
- OBCs are a vastly heterogeneous group. There are various *jaatis* or sub-castes which vary significantly in the societal and economic status.
 - o For instance, OBCs include land-owning communities in both north and south India alongside poorer sections of the society living on subsistence labour.

- There are two lists of OBCs — central and state, with former identified by the Union government dealing with the quotas in the central jobs, while the state lists are the mandate of state governments catering to local reservations.

The Mandal Commission

- In 1990, the then Union government announced that Other Backward Classes (OBCs) would get 27 percent reservation in jobs in central government services and public sector units (under Article 16(4) of the Constitution).
- The decision was based on **Mandal Commission Report (1980)**, which was set up in 1979 and chaired by B.P. Mandal. The mandate of the Mandal Commission was to identify socially or educationally backward classes to address caste discrimination.
- The recommendation for OBC reservations in central government institutions was implemented in 1992 while the education quota came into force in 2006 (under Article 15(4) of the Constitution).
- To ensure that benefits of the recommendations of the Mandal Commission percolated down to the most backward communities, the creamy layer criteria was invoked by Supreme Court in the ruling called the **'Indira Sawhney Judgment' (1992)**.
 - o A household with an annual income of Rs 8 lakh or above is classified as belonging to the 'creamy layer' among OBCs and hence is not eligible for reservation.

National Commission for Backward Classes (NCBC)

- The NCBC was set up as a statutory body under the NCBC Act, 1993.
- **102nd Constitutional Amendment Act** made it a constitutional body as per **Article 338B** of the Constitution.
- Key functions performed by the panel:
 - o In the case of grievances related to non-implementation of reservations, economic grievances, violence, etc. people will be able to move the Commission.
 - o To inquire into complaints of deprivation of rights and safeguards.

JUVENILE JUSTICE (CARE AND PROTECTION OF CHILDREN) AMENDMENT BILL

Parliament passed Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Amendment Bill, 2021, which seeks to amend the Juvenile Justice Act, 2015.

- A juvenile is a person less than 18 years of age. The Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015 addresses children in conflict with law and children in need of care and protection. It provided for the trial of juveniles in conflict with law in the age group of 16-18 years as adults in certain cases.
- The Act was brought to replace the Juvenile Delinquency Law and the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children Act) 2000.
- It fulfils India's commitment as a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the rights of the child, the Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Co-operation in respect of Inter-country Adoption (1993), and other related international instruments.

Amendments:

District Magistrates, including Additional District Magistrates, can issue adoption orders (both for intra-country and inter-country adoptions) in order to ensure speedy disposal of cases and enhance accountability.

- Redefines 'serious offences' to include such offences for which the punishment is:
 - o Minimum imprisonment for a term of 3-7 years;
 - o Maximum imprisonment for a term more than 7 years but no minimum imprisonment or minimum imprisonment of less than 7 years.
- Provides that all offences under the Act will be tried in the Children's Court.
- Such offences will be non-cognizable and non-bailable.

INTER STATE RIVER DISPUTE

Recently, the Ministry of Jal Shakti has notified the jurisdiction of Godavari River Management Board (GRMB) and Krishna River Management Board (KRMB) under the Andhra Pradesh Reorganization Act (APRA) of 2014.



Constitutional provisions for Inter State River water disputes

- **Under Seventh schedule:**

- o Entry 17 of State List deals with water i.e., water supply, irrigation, canal, drainage, embankments, water storage and water power.

Entry 56 of Union List gives power to the Union Government for the regulation and development of inter-state rivers and river valleys to the extent declared by Parliament to be expedient in the public interest.

- Article 262 provides for the adjudication of disputes or complaint relating to waters of inter-State rivers or river valleys.

o Parliament by law provides that neither the Supreme Court nor any other court is to exercise jurisdiction in respect of any such dispute or complaint.

97TH CONSTITUTION AMENDMENT ACT, 2011

A three-judge bench of the Supreme Court annulled part of the 97th Amendment Act and Part IX B of the Constitution which governs the “Cooperative Societies” in the country.

- ‘Cooperatives’ is a ‘State’ subject. However, the 97th Amendment Act was passed by the Parliament without getting them ratified by State legislatures as required by the Constitution.

- The Court declared that Part IXB of the Constitution is operative only insofar as it concerns Multi-State cooperative societies both within the various States and in the Union Territories.

- The SC has held that co-operative societies come under the “exclusive legislative power” of State legislatures.

- **97th Amendment Act:** This Amendment Act relates to effective management of co-operative societies in the country. The change in the Constitution has amended Article 19(1)(c) to give protection to the cooperatives and inserted Article 43 B and Part IX B, relating to them.

o Article 19(1)(c): It guarantees freedom to form association or unions or cooperative societies subject to certain restrictions.

o Article 43 B: It says that states shall endeavor to promote voluntary formation, autonomous functioning, democratic control and professional management of cooperative societies.

o Part IXB of the Constitution: It dictated the terms for running co-operative societies. It went to the extent of determining the number of directors a co-operative society should have or their length of tenure and even the necessary expertise required to become a member of the society.

FOREST RIGHTS ACT

Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) and the Ministry of Tribal Affairs sent a joint communication to all state governments for the “expeditious implementation” of the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006, commonly known as Forest Rights Act (FRA).

Important Definitions under the act



Community Forest Resource: means customary common forest land within the traditional or customary boundaries of the village or seasonal use of landscape in the case of pastoral communities, including reserved forests, protected forests and protected areas such as Sanctuaries and National Parks to which the community had traditional access.



Minor Forest Produce: It includes all non-timber forest produce of plant origin including bamboo, brush wood, stumps, cane, tussar, cocoons, honey, wax, lac, tendu or kendu leaves, medicinal plants and herbs, roots, tubers and the like.



Forest Dwelling Scheduled Tribes: Members or community of the Scheduled Tribes who primarily reside in and who depend on the forests or forest lands for bona fide livelihood needs and includes the Scheduled Tribe pastoralist communities.



Other Traditional Forest Dweller: Any member or community who has for at least three generations prior to the 13th December, 2005 primarily resided in and who depend on the forest or forests land for bona fide livelihood needs.



Critical Wildlife Habitat: Such areas of National Parks and Sanctuaries that are required to be kept as inviolate for the purposes of wildlife conservation as may be determined and notified by the Ministry of Environment and Forests after consultation with locally appointed experts.



Forest Villages: settlements which have been established inside the forests by the forest department of any State Government for forestry operations or which were converted into forest villages through the forest reservation process.

INDIA'S FOREX RESERVES

Recently, Indian Foreign Exchange reserves hit new lifetime high of around US\$ 612 billion, making India the fourth largest Forex reserve holder after China, Japan and Switzerland.

About Foreign Exchange Reserves

- Foreign Exchange Reserves, also known as Forex Reserves, are assets held on reserve by a central bank in foreign currencies.
- Mostly dominated by foreign currency assets, it can also include other instruments like bonds, treasury bills, Gold Reserves, Special Drawing Rights at IMF etc.
- US dollar, Euro, British pound, Japanese Yen and Chinese Yuan are some of the common currency assets with US dollar as main currency due to its use in settlement of all international transactions.
- Vital for International trade and commerce, Forex reserves serves a number of purposes like:

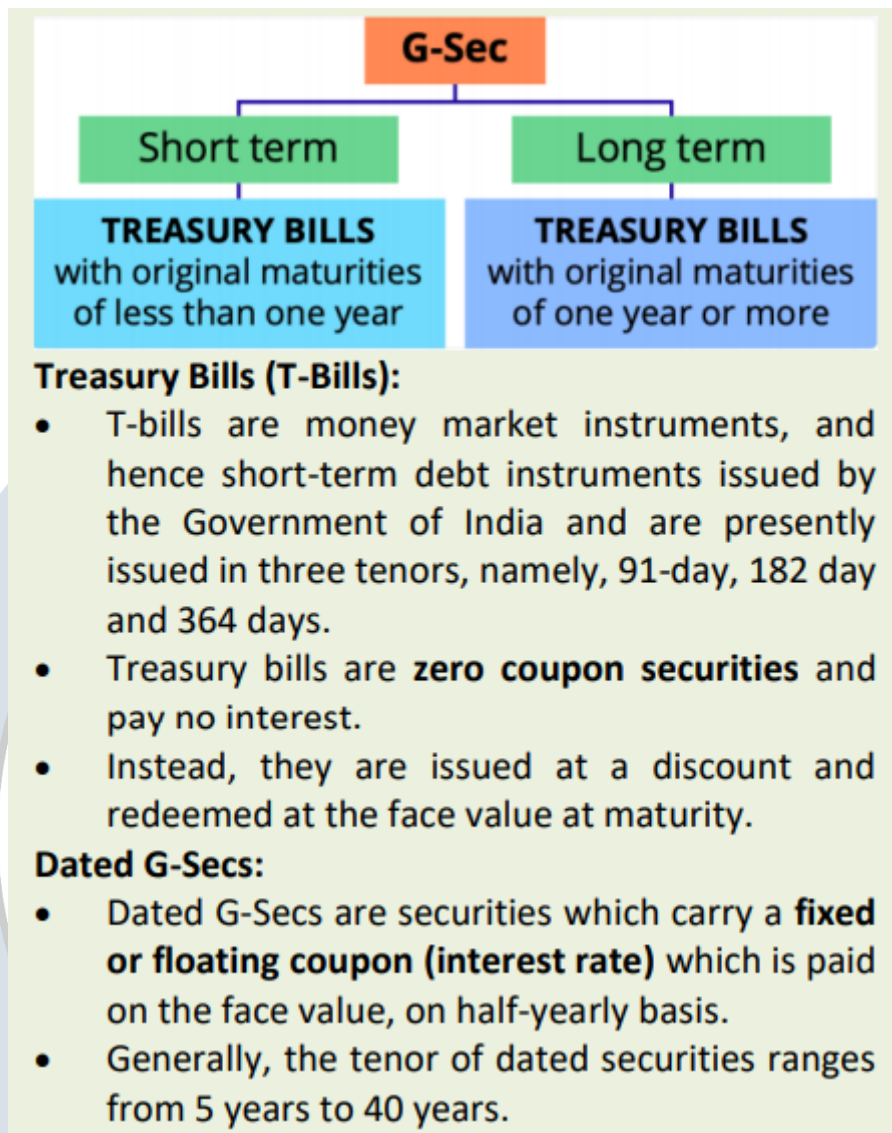


GOVERNMENT SECURITIES

Recently, Reserve Bank of India (RBI) allowed small retail investors to invest in government securities (G-Sec) by opening gilt accounts with the central bank under 'RBI Retail Direct' scheme.

About G-Sec and Gilt Accounts

- A Government Security (G-Sec) is a tradeable instrument issued by the Central Government or the State Governments. It acknowledges the Government's debt obligation.



CYBER SURVEILLANCE

Recent controversy regarding Pegasus spyware has fuelled the debate related to cyber surveillance in India.

What is cyber surveillance and its laws in India?

- Surveillance means close observation of a person or groups especially the one who are under suspicion or the act or the condition of being observed.

- Communication surveillance in India takes place primarily under two laws:
 - o The Indian Telegraph Act, 1885: Section 5 of the act had given power to central or state government to intercept any message/calls in two circumstances, if it is:
 - ✓ Against public safety or public emergency.
 - ✓ Necessary in the interests of the sovereignty and integrity of India; the security of the State; friendly relations with foreign states or public order; for preventing incitement to the commission of an offense.
 - ✓ Same restrictions are also imposed on free speech under Article 19(2) of the Constitution.
 - o Information Technology (IT) Act, 2000: It was enacted to provide legal recognition for electronic communication, electronic commerce and cybercrimes etc.

Decoding Pegasus

Pegasus is a spyware, developed and licensed by an Israeli company, NSO Group. It can be used to infiltrate smartphones that run on both iOS and Android operating systems, and turn them into surveillance devices. A low down:

- Pegasus's method of attack is called zero-click attacks, which do not require any action by the user. The spyware can hack a device simply by giving a **missed WhatsApp call**

- It will **alter call logs** so that the user has no knowledge of what happened

- Once the spyware enters the device, it installs a module to track call logs, read messages, emails, calendars, Internet history, and gather location data to send the information to the attacker

- It can also be **installed manually** on a device or over a wireless transceiver

- If it fails to connect with its command-and-control server for more than 60 days, it **self-destructs and removes all traces**

- If it detects that it was installed on the wrong device or SIM card, it will **self-destruct**

- Amnesty International noted that despite issuing security updates, **Android and iOS devices were breached**

- To stay safe, users need to ensure that software in devices is updated and all apps are installed directly through the official stores. **No suspicious email or text should be clicked**



NATIONAL DOLPHIN RESEARCH CENTRE (NDRC)

India's and Asia's first National Dolphin Research Centre (NDRC) is coming up in the premises of Patna University, Bihar.

- The centre is being set up on banks of Ganges, as per recommendation of a steering committee constituted for implementation of Project Dolphin.
- As per the committee, Bihar had a natural advantage as it accounted for 50% of the world's river dolphin population.
- The Gangetic River dolphin is India's national aquatic animal (declared in 2009).
- It is one of four freshwater dolphin species in the world. The other three are:
 - o 'Baiji' in Yangtze River in China (Functionally extinct since 2006)
 - o 'Boto' in Amazon River
 - o 'Bhulan' in Indus River in Pakistan
- The Gangetic Dolphin is endemic to the Indian sub-continent and has a fairly extensive distribution range. It is found in the Ganga -Brahmaputra - Meghna and Karnaphuli-Sangu river systems of India and Bangladesh, while a few individuals survive in the Karnali, and the Sapta Kosi Rivers in Nepal.
- It is blind and finds its way and prey in river waters through echolocation. They are usually found in turbulent waters, where there are enough fish for them to feed on.

INTERNAL MIGRANTS

The Supreme Court of India has delivered its judgment in the 'migrant labourer' case.

- The apex court took suo motu cognisance of the plight of the migrant workers at the height of the exodus last year and continued hearing the case through the second wave and gave following directions-
- All states and Union territories (UT) to implement the 'One Nation One Ration Card' scheme for the benefit of migrant workers by July 31, 2021.

- Provide food to non-ration cardholders, increase allocation of subsidised food and allow a migrant to access dry ration from anywhere under National Food Security Act.
- The work on the portal for the National Data Base for Unorganised Workers (NDUW Project) has to be completed by July 31, 2021 and the Central Government and the respective states/UTs must complete the process of registration of the unorganized labourers/migrant workers by December 31, 2021.

WORLD HERITAGE TAG

Recently, Kakatiya Rudreswara Temple (also known as the Ramappa Temple) and Dholavira have been inscribed on UNESCO's World Heritage list.

- With the addition of these two sites, India now has 40 sites in the UNESCO's World Heritage list (32 cultural, seven natural and one mixed).
- Dholavira is the first site of the ancient Indus Valley Civilisation (IVC) in India to get the tag.



DHOLAVIRA

Dholavira (Occupied between ca. 3000-1500 BCE), the southern centre of the Harappan Civilization, is sited on the arid island of Khadir (located within Rann of Kachchh) in Gujarat. It was discovered in 1968 by archaeologist Jagat Pati Joshi.

- At Dholavira an entire sequence spanning the history of Harappan cities, from early Harappan town / pre-urban phase to the height of the Harappan expansion and the late Harappan is observed.

WEST BENGAL ASSEMBLY PASSES RESOLUTION TO SET UP LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

- Legislative Council (LC) is the upper house in the state and like the Rajya Sabha, it is a permanent House.
 - o The members of the Council are either nominated by the Governor of the state or are indirectly elected.
 - o Tenure of the members of the council is six years, and a third of the members of the House retire after every two years.
 - o Eligibility criteria: Indian citizen who is at least 30 years of age; a person cannot simultaneously be a Member of Parliament and State legislature.
- Article 169 of the Constitution empowers the Legislative Assembly to create or abolish a Legislative Council by passing a resolution.
 - o Also under Article 171, LC cannot have more than one-third of the number of MLAs in the state, and not less than 40 members. (Total number of members in LC of a State shall not exceed one-third of the total number of members in the Legislative Assembly of that State, provided that total number of members in LC shall in no case be less than forty.)
 - o The resolution has to be passed by two-thirds of the Assembly members.
 - o Then a Bill to this effect has to be passed by Parliament.
- At present six states namely Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and Karnataka have a Legislative Council.
- Composition of LC
 - o 1/3rd are elected by the Legislative Assembly.

- o 1/3rd are elected by the local bodies like a municipality or other local authorities.
- o 1/12th are elected by graduates.
- o 1/12th are elected by teachers.
- o 1/6th are nominated by the Governor

MEKONG-GANGA COOPERATION (MGC)

- The MGC initiative comprising six countries — India, Cambodia, Myanmar, Thailand, Laos and Vietnam — was launched in 2000 to boost cooperation in a range of areas including connectivity, education, tourism and culture.



BHIM-UPI

- Bhutan has become the first country to adopt India's UPI standards for its quick response (QR) code.
- o It is also the second country after Singapore to have BHIM-UPI acceptance at merchant locations.
- BHIM-UPI is India's real-time digital payment system for safe, easy & instant digital payments.

DIGITAL INITIATIVES LAUNCHED

- Matsya Setu App: Launched by Ministry for Fisheries, Animal Husbandry, and Dairying, it aims to disseminate latest freshwater aquaculture technologies to aqua farmers of the country.
- Kisan Sarathi Digital Platform: It was jointly launched by the Ministry of Agriculture and Electronics and Information Technology on the occasion of Indian Council of Agriculture Research (ICAR) Foundation Day.

DEFENCE EXERCISES

- INDRA: The 12th edition of Indo-Russia joint military Exercise INDRA 2021 held at Volgograd, Russia in Baltic Sea.
- o It was first initiated in 2003 to strengthen mutual confidence and interoperability of both countries.
- CORPAT: The 36th edition of India-Indonesia coordinated patrol (CORPAT) between Indian Navy and the Indonesian Navy has been conducted to bolster the maritime cooperation between the two navies across the Indo-Pacific.
- Exercise Cutlass Express 2021: Indian Naval Ship Talwar is participating in the annual maritime exercise conducted along the East Coast of Africa.

- Passage Exercise (PASSEX): Navies of India and the U.K. participated in a two-day bilateral Passage Exercise in the Bay of Bengal.

DRINK FROM TAP- SUJAL MISSION

- Puri (Odisha) has become the first city in the country to have 'drink from tap' facility on 24- hour basis under the Sujal Mission.
- The Sujal Mission was launched in 2020 to ensure quality tapped drinking water in more than 15 urban areas.

FIRST GREEN HYDROGEN MOBILITY PROJECT

- Renewable Energy Limited (REL), a 100% subsidiary of National Thermal Power Corporation (NTPC), signed an MoU with the UT of Ladakh, to set up the country's first green Hydrogen Mobility project by plying hydrogen buses and setting up solar plant and green hydrogen generation unit in Leh.

o Green hydrogen is hydrogen produced from electrolysis (splitting of water into oxygen and hydrogen) by passing electricity from renewable sources resulting in no carbon emissions.

24*7 HELPLINE FOR WOMEN(7827170170)

- National Commission for Women (NCW) has started 24*7 Helpline for Women affected by violence.
- o It has been developed in collaboration with Digital India Corporation.
- o It can be used by any girl or woman aged 18 years and above.

About NCW

- o It is a statutory body under the National Commission for Women Act (1990).
- o NCW works toward protection of Women Rights and help needy women through

- ✓ Review the Constitutional and Legal safeguards for women.
- ✓ Facilitate redressal of grievances.

ZIKA VIRUS

- Kerala has reported cases of Zika virus (ZV) for the first time.
- ZV spreads mostly by the bite of an infected Aedes mosquito, which bites during the day (the same mosquito that transmits dengue, chikungunya and yellow fever).

